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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to determine whether perceptions of role involvement by police patrolmen were significantly related to either future or concurrent job performance. A secondary objective was to analyze changes in the perceived role involvement of new patrolmen during their assimilation into a police organization. The perceived role involvement of a sample of new patrolmen from a large metropolitan police force was measured on four occasions over a period of approximately two years. A surprising finding was that the best performers were those who spent less time and energy on the job. These results plus the decrease of role involvement during assimilation imply that a norm of inactivity exists in this urban police department. If this department is representative of other urban police forces, then this study has widespread implications for police selection, training, and assimilation. (Author)

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Role Involvement: Changes During Assimilation and Relationships with Job Performance

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Role Involvement: Changes During Assimilation and Relationships with Job Performance

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> If his perceptions of his role correspond to those of his superiors in his organization, then he will be applying his effort where it will count the most for successful performance as defined by the organization. If his perceptions are "incorrect" (i.e., do not correspond to those of his superiors), then it is possible that he may expend a great deal of effort without organizationally defined successful performance taking place. (Porter & Lawler, 1968, p. 24).

This quote by Porter and Lawler is indicative of the emphasis that many organizational theorists place on a worker's role perceptions (e.g., Graen, 1976; House & Rizzo, 1972; Katz & Kahn, 1966). Role perceptions are postulated to give direction to a worker's effort and, therefore, are related to job performance.

The primary purpose of this study was to determine whether perceptions of role involvement by police patrolmen were significantly related to either future or concurrent job performance. A secondary objective was to analyze changes in the perceived role involvement of new patrolmen during their assimilation into a police organization.

Method

Sample

The sample used in this study was employed by a large urban police department and was comprised of three groups: (a) 101 new patrolmen who were members of two successive police academy classes, (b) 52 patrolmen veterans who had a minimum of three years of experience, and (c) 26 supervisors who had the rank of sergeant or above and had a minimum of five years on the police force.

Instruments

(a) Role perceptions. Role perceptions were measured by a 30-item questionnaire containing specific behaviors in which patrolmen engage. This questionnaire had the same format as the Role Behavior Index used by Graen, Orris, and Johnson (1973) and measured a patrolman's perceived degree of involvement in his role activities. Patrolmen were asked to indicate the amount of time and energy that they expected to spend on each behavior. Answers were indicated on a seven-point scale ranging from none to a great deal.

(b) Job performance. Supervisors rated the performance of 47 members of the two police academy classes and of 52 veteran patrolmen on behavioral items which were specifically developed for this police department (Alvares & Bernardin, 1975). Ratings were made on 62 job behaviors which yielded scores on 11 subscales when the appropriate items were summed.

Procedure

A repeated measures design was employed. The perceived role involvement of a sample of new patrolmen from a large metropolitan

police force was measured on four occasions over a period of approximately 2 years. The expected role involvement of future patrolmen was measured when they applied for the job (N=101 at T_1); perceptions of actual role involvement were measured at the end of a 4 month training academy (N=95 at T_2), after 8 more months of street duty (N=94 at T_3), and after 1.5 to 2 years of being on the job (N=47 at T_4). Supervisory performance ratings were collected for these same 47 patrolmen at T_4 along with the supervisory role expectations. The perceptions of role involvement by the veteran patrolmen were measured only at T_4.

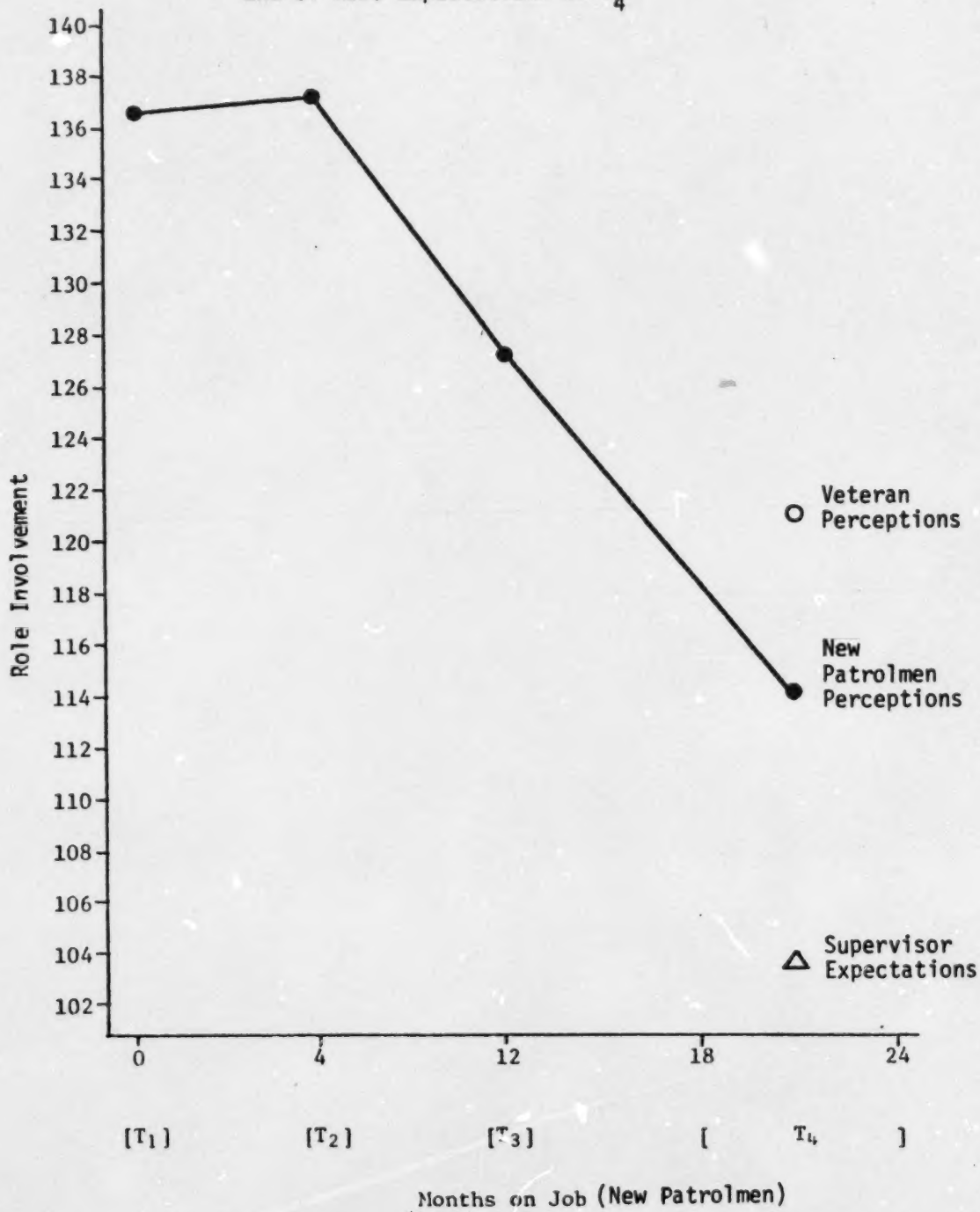
Results

A principal component solution of each of the four measures of role involvement was used for identifying the factor structure of each measure. Each solution was carried out with a varimax rotation of two components. The factor structures of the four measures were constant over time, T_1 through T_4. Each measure had both a crime-related activities factor and a routine activities factor.

A one-way ANOVA with repeated measures was computed in order to investigate longitudinal trends in the role involvement of the patrolmen. The solution of the ANOVA indicated that the mean of perceived role involvement significantly decreased over time, $F(3,138) = 16.1$, $p < .01$. The role involvement means are graphed in Figure 1. The role involvement of patrolmen decreased steadily over time with the exception of an increase at T_2. This increase at T_2 accounts for the fact that, in a trend analysis, the quadratic trend of the measure of role perception accounted for significant variance beyond that accounted for by the

Figure 1

Means of Role Involvement at T_1, T_2, T_3 and T_4
and of Role Expectations at T_4



linear trend.

Two step-wise discriminant function analyses were performed using the raw scores and the factor scores of role involvement in order to determine which measures best discriminated between low and high performers. The sample was dichotomized into low and high performers by the median of the summated performance total. The results of the two discriminant functions are in Tables 1 and 2. Each analysis correctly classified 66% of the patrolmen. Both discriminant function analyses showed that perceived role involvement at T_1 and T_4 significantly differentiated between low and high performers. Moreover, high performers had lower role involvement mean scores than low performers ($p < .05$).

Discussion

Inactivity Norm

A negative relationship exists between the summated total of job performance and the role perceptions of both crime-related and routine activities. This negative relationship is surprising because it means that those patrolmen who perceive that they spend (or expect to spend) less time and energy on the job are rated as the best performers. In most job situations, a positive relationship would be expected between performance and time and energy spent on the job.

What is different in a police organization which accounts for a negative relationship? First, the normative expectations of the supervisors and of the veterans concerning the amount of time and energy to be spent on the job are lower, not higher, than perceptions of new patrolmen, especially in the area of crime-related activities. These lower expectations are obvious in Figure 1. The answer to why a negative

Table 1

Stepwise Discriminant Function Analysis on Raw Scores of Role Involvement for Low and High Performers

Variable Entered		Step Number	Low Performance Group Role Involvement Means	High Performance Group Role Involvement Means	F to Enter	Wilks Lambda	Significance Level
Role Involvement	T_4	1	125.38	102.48	7.10	.86	.011*
	T_1	2	138.79	133.91	.27	.86	.035*
	T_3	3	133.88	120.57	.04	.86	.083
	T_2	4	140.46	133.61	.01	.86	.158

Note. Performance groups were divided by the median of the summated performance total; N = 47.

* $p < .05$

Table 2

Stepwise Discriminant Function Analysis on

Factor Scores of Role Involvement for

Low and High Performers

	Variable Entered	Step Number	Low Performance Group	High Performance Group	F to Enter	Wilks Lambda	Significance Level
			Role Involvement Means				
Role Involvement	Factor 1;T_4	1	.36	-.37	7.04	.86	.011*
	Factor 2;T_1	2	-.32	.16	2.12	.82	.015*
	Factor 2;T_4	3	.12	-.13	1.75	.79	.018*
	Factor 1;T_3	4	.47	-.27	.23	.79	.037*
	Factor 2;T_2	5	-.02	.19	.14	.79	.069
	Factor 2;T_3	6	-.04	.11	.02	.79	.119
	Factor 1;T_1 [a]	7	.19	-.26	.01	.79	.188

Note. Performance groups were divided by the median of the summated performance total; N = 47.

[a]Factor 1 at T_2 was not entered in the analysis because it did not have an F greater than .005.

*$p < .05$

relationship exists between role perception and ratings of job performance should be apparent. A patrolman is rated higher by supervisors when he fulfills their expectations. This finding exemplifies the opening quote by Porter and Lawler. The more accurate a patrolman's perceptions of the job are in terms of supervisory expectations, the better his performance ratings become. Thus, as patrolmen's perceptions decrease, they become more in line with the existing organizational norm.

This explanation, however, leads to another question. Why are the norms of this police organization low, and, therefore, why is it desirable to spend less time and energy on the job? Van Maanen (1975) refers to this phenomenon as "a 'lay low, don't make waves' approach to urban policing" (p. 207).

Some of the conditions that Van Maanen suggested were responsible for the lay low dictum in the police force he studied are also applicable to the department sampled in this study. (In fact, these same conditions may apply to many urban police departments, and therefore, are most disturbing.) (1) Very few rewards are given for good police work accomplished by a patrolman. If any recognition is given, it is usually for poor police work and punitive actions are taken against the patrolman. Because there are more negative sanctions issued than rewards, laying low becomes a self-preservation technique. Less activity may not achieve positive recognition for a patrolman, but at least it avoids departmental punishment. (2) Police work stresses cooperation among patrolmen and is based on the concept of teamwork. Work and danger for one patrolman usually causes work and danger for other patrolmen, the other team members. Laying low can be viewed as a team-preservation technique which understandably also achieves peer approval. Inactivity by one team member means that the team will face less paper work and

danger, and, therefore, is desirable. (3) Peer disapproval also controls any rate busting tendencies which might exist in a patrolman. As in most group working situations, a rate buster is apt to be distrusted and ostracized. This, however, is not true of inactivity; when inactivity does not create extra work for other group members, it is met with approval. These three conditions act as powerful agents of the assimilation process which perpetuates this lay low norm.

Assimilation Process

A patrolman's perceptions of the time and energy required by the job, decrease rather consistently over the first 1.5 to 2 years of work. This decreasing linear trend of role involvement over time is indicative of the success of the assimilation process. Rookies, who start with a zealous approach to police work, soon embody the don't make waves philosophy. Lofquist and Dawis (1969), in their theory of work adjustment, state that an individual seeks to achieve and maintain consonance with his work environment. This process is certainly aided by the fact that rookies are usually assigned to a veteran partner for on-the-job training, and therefore, are given firsthand exposure to the group norm immediately after leaving the training academy. Also, the realities of modern police work are encountered for the first time, and the enormity of the service component of the job is experienced.

Obviously, there are many other aspects which account for increasing crime (e.g., the inefficient criminal justice system, and societal acceptance of violence), but a police force which is active in either preventing or solving crime would necessarily be a help in controlling the crime rate. The conditions which are responsible for creating and

maintaining this lay low norm should be changed in order for a more constructive norm to thrive. Two immediate changes could be instituted in many departments which would be a step in the appropriate direction. First, the principles of behavior modification could provide momentum for change. Police administrators should change their policy of recognition so that good work is rewarded instead of being ignored or expected. This basic tenet of Behaviorism has been grossly neglected in many departments. Secondly, an attempt should be made to shield new recruits from the existing norms. This would mean that rookies be given less exposure to normative veterans. Perhaps special on-the-job instructors could be trained instead of utilizing regular patrolmen.

In summary, a major concern of police administrators and of urban citizens should be to determine whether or not this norm is present in their department. If this norm does exist, then an attempt should be made to replace it with a more constructive norm. This would mean revamping police reward structures, training programs, and probationary periods. Hopefully, the organizational climate of urban police departments would be changed for the better.

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